Parish Profile

Tacoma parish known for its pastoral care extends outreach

Our Lady Queen of Heaven to mark 50th anniversary event

BY ARMANDO MACHADO

The members of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish come from various backgrounds but share a common mission of reaching out to those in need, says the pastor, Father John Renggli—who has been busy these days preparing for the parish’s two Nov. 12 Jubilee Mass celebrations commemorating construction of the church building.

Archbishop Alex. J. Brunett will celebrate both Masses. The church was built and dedicated in 1956; the parish was founded in 1950.

“It’s the diversity, and it’s the pastoral care,” Father Renggli noted in describing the parish’s strength and character. “It is a strong parish, and it’s growing. The groups that visit the sick and the homebound, they do a remarkable job,” the pastor added. “And we have 10 acres in a park-like setting; it’s wonderful.”

He noted that one significant highlight for the parish is coming soon — by way of a jubilee social justice project that will provide safe, clean water for a rural school in South Africa.

The patented Pump system that the parish is providing has a storage tank as well as the pump and the children’s merry-go-round that powers it, Father Renggli said. Along with providing safe drinking water for the school, the system will serve 2,500 people in the school’s community. The $16,000 project will be made possible with contributions from parishioners.

Parish then and now

When the parish was established, the community “was almost entirely” of mixed European descent, Father Renggli said. “Now it’s about 50 percent Caucasian and 30 percent Chamorro (ancestry from Guam),” he said, noting the many military families from Guam. He said the remaining 20 percent includes Filipino, Korean, African-American and other ethnic groups — and that the community has always been mostly blue-collar.

Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly appointed Father Bill Greier as the first pastor in 1950. “He had a very strong influence,” Father Renggli said. “He was beloved by the people. He was here the first 24 years.”

Before the parish was established, it was a mission church for many years, starting in 1893, called St. Benedict.

Among the highlights in the parish life, Father Renggli said, “were the Bingo Nights to help pay off the debts — and also the parish dances for the social life.”

Another high point, he said, was the 1971 construction of the parish center — named the Kateri Center after Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, first Native American to be beatified. “Father Greier loved the Indian people,” Father Renggli noted.

He said other high points include the establishment of the parish’s Knights of Columbus council and the Parish Council in the early 1970s, and in later years the introduction of the Life Teen program and the Fall Fest.

Former pastor Father Michael McDermott, now pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Tacoma, said OLQH is a parish “rich in cultural diversity, and very involved with the larger community,” including Parkland and Spanaway.

Parishioner memories

Our Lady Queen of Heaven also boasts an active St. Vincent de Paul conference.

Margaret McGillivray, 76, the group’s vice president and a member of the parish for 40 years noted that they “provide all kinds of financial assistance.

“It’s something that is quite fulfilling for me,” she said, adding that the parish in general “is a wonderful, welcoming place.”

Trophy Kanton, 89, another longtime parishioner, was among the first members of the parish. She recalls attending Mass when it was St. Benedict’s mission. Kanton said she volunteered for Bingo Nights, bake sales and other activities throughout the decades up until recently.

Parish Snapshot

Founded: 1950 by Archbishop Thomas Connolly (Church built and dedicated in 1956)

Registered Households: about 1,150

Address: 14601 "A" St. S., Tacoma, WA 98465

Phone: (253) 537-3252

Pastors:
Rev. Bill Greier, 1950
Rev. Ed Kearney, 1974
Rev. Jack Walmsley, 1982
Rev. Dennis Wood, 1984
Rev. Vincent Peterson, 1990
Rev. Michael McDermott, 1993
Rev. John Renggli, 2000

Jubilee Celebration:
Sunday Nov. 12: 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Masses. Archbishop Alex. J. Brunett, presider. (Breakfast after the first Mass; hot fudge sundaes after the second Mass). The parish will also celebrate the jubilee during the 5:30 p.m. Saturday Nov. 11 Mass.

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